

Releasing Your Spouse to Live Their Dreams

The main earthly voice in my life is my husband. I often am asked, "As a mother and pastor's wife and do you do it all?" I have a lot of help: sitters and help with cleaning and administrative help. But the most obvious answer is that without the blessing, leadership, and sacrifice of my husband, with all I have in my life, I would be unable to do any of it. We have fought our way to a good marriage, and it has not been easy. But as passionate and strong and independent as I can be, it actually feels so good to come under his leadership.

There isn't a doubt that the measure of support we feel from our husbands, if we are married, will and should affect our dreams. I asked Zac to share his road to releasing and leading me to use my gifts and fulfill my callings. So wives, hand this over to your husbands.

A LETTER FROM ZAC

It was a perfect, eighty-degree day on the lawn of a plantation house in downtown Little Rock. This was the day all of our dreams would become a reality. I stood looking in Jennie's eyes, and before God, I promised to lead her by daily dying to my selfish desires, just as Christ did. The record states that the pastor read that day from Ephesians 5:28 to 29, "Husbands ought to love their wives as their own no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for it, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body."

But honestly, I don't remember the ceremony very well or the charge of the pastor, or the vows I spoke to Jennie. I just know in the midst of sixteen years of marriage, many moves, four kids, mortgages, and unfulfilling jobs, the dreams we dreamed on many dates before marriage quickly gave way to a lot of weighty responsibility.

I went from trying to win this girl's heart and longing for

her freedom to pursue God's dreams for her, to actually using the Bible's language of submission to kill any dream that would inconvenience or threaten me. So, not long after the wedding day, Jennie found herself with a passive aggressive, emotionless husband, and her God-given passions and dreams began to die.

At the time, I thought I was right and biblically justified in my "leadership" of Jennie. But I was wrong. I had memorized "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands," but had no clue of what it meant for husbands to nourish and cherish their wives (Eph. 5:22).

You see, husbands, to nourish and cherish your wife means to unleash your wife to be everything she has been designed to be in Christ. Yes, that means you are to live with her in an understanding way, to really know her.

Yes, that means you are going to be held responsible for the way you pointed your wife to Jesus, the way you cherished and nourished her as she continually gave herself to the many seemingly mediocre tasks of daily life, and the initiative you took to shepherd her gifts and callings.

So how did I miss all that? Did someone forget to teach me that during premarital counseling? Why did the dreaming die so quickly after "I do"?

I think for most of us our failures to nourish and cherish boil down to 2 reasons:

1. We have a darkened, jaded view of submission. We have used submission to squelch our wives so we can justify our "more important" pursuits. Of course few of us would say that as men, our callings and gifts and passions are more important. But that is often how we lead and how our wives perceive our leadership. Tonight, ask your wife if she feels nourished and cherished to be all she can be in Christ.

2. We are insecure in who we are in Christ. We have tried to get our fulfillment from marriage and a career and a family and whatever else. Fill in the blank for yourself. But those

identities eventually slip through our hands and leave us empty. An insecure husband will never be able to cheer for his wife's callings or cherish and nourish her gifts. Insecure husbands think about themselves first. There were countless times early in my marriage when I would secretly resent my wife's gifts. Or maybe I would even be so noble to encourage her to use her gift of teaching, only to resent being left with the kids as she went to use those gifts.

It took me years to realize the problem wasn't being married to a passionate, gifted, "unsubmissive" wife who would start using her gifts only to have me reel her back into reality. The problem was me: my misunderstanding of my role to lead us as a team on mission, and my resentment of seeing my wife walking in freedom while I was immersed in my own insecurities.

So, husbands, if you are still reading this, I believe you really want your wife to be all she is designed to be in Christ. You want your children to see a mom who doesn't make her children her identity, but disciplines them by giving her life away outside the home as well. And you want to want to sit across from your wife and ask her about her dreams and callings as you affirm her.

So, how do you become a dream-releasing husband?

- Live out your new identity. As long as you are searching to prove yourself or your identity, you will never grasp how completely loved and fully accepted you are before God. If you are in Christ, you have nothing left to prove. Jesus fulfilled your desperate desire to measure up. The more that truth sinks in, the less you will look to your job or money or your wife for fulfillment. Dream-releasing husbands are the most secure in Christ.

- Own your role. Realize that your call to nourish and cherish your wife does not depend on her performance. Christ gave his life for the very people (you and me) who put him on the cross. As you become more secure in your own identity in Christ, you will begin to experience the joy of seeing your wife use her gifts and respond to her callings.

- Celebrate the loss of control. As you become more secure in

Christ and begin cheering on your wife to use her gifts too, you will feel a new tension surface: a life that feels semi-chaotic. You realize that what you had been calling “balance” for your family was really a determined effort to control your life at all costs. You see, God never promises balance. So this new life that feels semichaotic is likely a symptom of a couple following the leading of the Holy Spirit. And no matter the suffering or sacrifice or a sink full of dirty dishes or lack of clean boxers, you will be full of joy because Jesus is infinitely more satisfying than the god of control.

Men, husbands, this is God’s call on our lives. It is the noblest calling a man could ever receive. When we get to the point where we see ourselves as the leader of a team, and our mission is to build God’s kingdom, releasing our spouse will actually become energizing. And I bet you will rediscover the woman you fell in love with.

Zac

Women, as you read, know that there were many years when I did not feel released to use my gifts. And in my insecurity, I fought for my rights and nagged for my freedom. That didn’t work. Our marriage became healthy again with a lot of time and prayer and counseling and surrender. We are having a lot of fun these days. It is worth the work. Scripture talks about a day when there will be no longer be slave or free, Jew or Greek, male or female. But that day hasn’t come yet. These tensions won’t last forever. My little girl really will be an incredible mother if those dolls turn into real babies. But as a woman I pray that her worth and identity aren’t based on how she performs roles as a mother, or a daughter, or a wife, or a friend, or an employee. I pray that her soul is steadied and secure because her eyes are laser focused on the one who built and rescued her soul.

Excerpted from the newly released Restless Because You Meant for More (Thomas Nelson) by Jennie Allen. Jennie is a Bible teacher who is passionate about inspiring a new generation of women to encounter the invisible God.